

# FRIENDS OF Florham

Spring 2004

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## Winterthur and Florham — A History Together

Many of us are perhaps familiar with the name Winterthur as the Museum of American Decorative Arts. Winterthur has a long history with the du Pont family as well as social ties to the Twombly family and Florham.

The Twombly and du Pont families were friendly. Florence Twombly visited Winterthur on four separate occasions and Henry F. and his wife, the former Ruth Wales, are shown in the gardens at Florham during one of their visits (*see photo*). The 1920s brought a more casual feel and appearance to Winterthur. It is interesting to note that while Ruth du Pont thought that Florham was lovely she found it “too studied.”

Located in the beautiful Brandywine Valley in Delaware, Winterthur was established in 1837 by Jacques Antoine Bidemann, who originally arrived in Delaware in 1813. He came from Europe to assess his family’s investments in a gunpowder factory originally known as E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co. Bidemann remained in Delaware, became a partner in the company and, in 1816, married Evelina Gabrielle du Pont, second daughter of founder Eluthere Irenee du Pont. The name “Winterthur” was given to the property in honor of Bidemann’s ancestral hometown in Switzerland.

While there are similarities between Florham and Winterthur, it is interesting to note some of the differences between the two estates. The first notable difference is time — Winterthur was established in 1837 and Florham in 1897.

Winterthur was originally a 2,400-acre working farm with approximately 20 individual farms on

the property including cattle, poultry, sheep, pigs and greenhouses. Florham served as the spring and fall residence of Florence and Hamilton Twombly. It was where Hamilton Twombly

raised a world-famous herd of Guernsey dairy cattle.

### Style and Changes

Florham was designed in a Georgian Revival style by renowned architects McKim, Mead and White. It has not changed over the years. Winterthur has undergone many changes of style in both the house and the gardens. As tastes and fashions changed, so did Winterthur. The present look of the main house at Winterthur is an over-scaled Georgian Revival style of architecture based on American examples from ap-

proximately 1929. Florham was inspired by the Christopher Wren wing at Hampton Court in England and is one of our finest examples of America’s Gilded Age homes. Winterthur embodies the ideal of a Jazz Age American country house, and changes continued to be made throughout the 20th century.

Florham was at its height during the Gilded Age and entertaining was an important part of life at the estate. A staff of 125 was employed by the Twomblys. Guests were greeted by footmen, coachmen and chauffeurs attired in maroon livery, which was the signature color of the Vanderbilt family. A domestic staff was in place to ensure



Henry F. and Ruth Wales du Pont are shown in the gardens at Florham during one of their visits.

Photo: Courtesy, The Winterthur Library; Winterthur Archives



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## President's Letter

Hooray! Spring is almost here! After a cold and snowy winter, hopefully we will be able to move forward with some of our pending projects. Although the campus looked very beautiful in the snow, we were unable to complete our three small stone walls designating the "Frederick Law Olmsted Cutleaf Maple Garden." The walls are across from the new residence hall, Rutherford Hall, and before the library entrance on the East Entrance road to the campus (from Danforth Road). It is our particular aim to protect this remaining Olmsted area, as it is spectacularly beautiful in the autumn. There is an explanatory plaque on the recently completed center wall.

Another of our projects is to replace the white-and-red bars at the crossroads blocking the entrance to the Mansion Drive. We're looking for something more appropriate for the Olmsted grounds and the McKim, Mead and White buildings. We also have other projects in the planning stage, which we will report on at a later date.

The upstairs hall in the Mansion was repainted in a lighter and brighter color, and there is comfortable seating and lighting, making it a more inviting place for the students to study or wait between classes.

The committee is working hard for our forthcoming Gala on May 22. Many of us look forward to this, our principal fund-raising event.

Finally, we're thrilled that once again our good friend, Sam White, returned to talk to us about the Venetian influence on the architecture of the many buildings in New York City and throughout the country that were designed by his great grandfather, Stanford White, and his firm, McKim, Mead and White. Sam is a fascinating speaker, as many of you have undoubtedly discovered. His wife, Elizabeth, who co-authored the recently published book, *McKim, Mead & White: The Masterworks*, accompanied him, and they happily signed copies of this beautiful book which were available. So we're glad that many of you were able to join us on Sunday afternoon, March 21, and could be with us to enjoy his talk and our reception afterward.

Won't you become a member of the Friends of Florham at this time and participate with us in our restoration and preservation projects? Just fill out the form on the last page of this newsletter and send it in. We'll welcome your joining us in these very gratifying accomplishments.

Emma Joy Dana

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## Washington Portrait Restored



Gen. George Washington's portrait hangs in the Great Hall, the Mansion.

This past year, a handsome, large portrait of Gen. George Washington was restored by the Friends of Florham. It was the property of Fairleigh Dickinson University for many years, but due to its poor condition was kept in storage. Now, after restoration, it is hanging in the Great Hall of the Mansion.

The oil painting (approximately 50 inches by 40 inches) has an old hand-written paper label on the rear of the antique gold frame stating:

"From a drawing . . . from sitting . . . by the painter Robert Edge Pine . . . ed to Laurence Newell-by Daniel Bowen, Boston."

Robert Edge Pine, (c. 1720–1788), an English artist who painted portraits and historical scenes, was, in his time, favorably compared with the outstanding artist Sir Joshua Reynolds. Pine be-

came quite sympathetic to the cause of the American Revolution and came from England to live in America in 1784. He took up residence in Philadelphia, where he opened an art museum (the first in the new nation). During his four years there (he died in 1788), he painted 90 works of art.

Pine visited Washington at Mt. Vernon in April and May of 1785. He had obtained various letters of introduction to Washington — in England, from George William Fairfax, a close friend and former neighbor of the Washingtons in Virginia, and from various noted Philadelphians such as Morris, Dickenson, Hopkinson, etc. He painted the general, as well as portraits of the four Custis children, during his 22 days at Mt. Vernon. Washington sat again for Pine the next year, 1786, in Philadelphia. There were four portraits of Washington listed in the inventory of Pine's estate.

Based on the old label referencing Pine, we decided to research the provenance of the painting. We sent a digital photograph to the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., which had published an extensive study of Robert Edge

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# McKim, Mead & White Revisited

Lest we take our architectural heritage for granted, *McKim, Mead & White: The Masterworks*, written by Samuel G. White, architect and great-grandson of Stanford White, and Elizabeth White, writer and editor, reminds us of the importance and enduring influence of the firm's public buildings on our urban landscape. From about 1879 to 1914, McKim, Mead & White, the leading architectural firm in the United States at the time, completed approximately 1,000 commissions including representative major works such as the Boston Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library, Madison Square Garden, the Rhode Island State House, expansion of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, stately residences such as Florham, and, in the early stages, large, wood shingle-style houses.

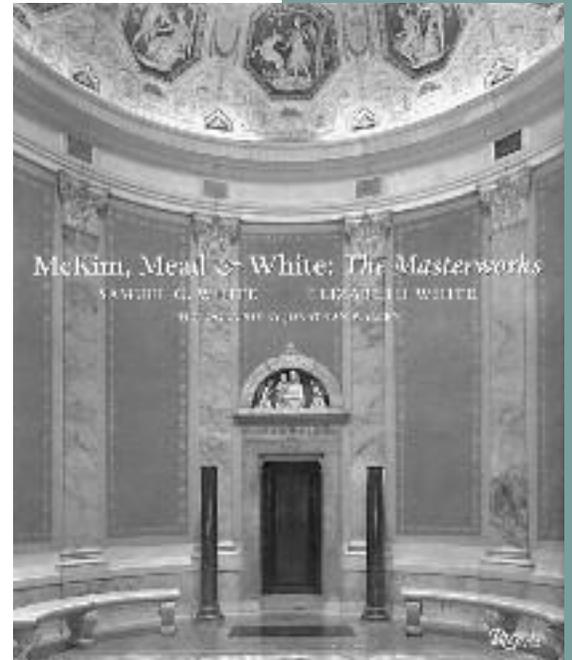
McKim, Mead & White capitalized on major shifts in the economy in the latter part of the 19th century — the growth of industry, the creation of substantial wealth in industry and the financial sectors and a related rise in social and cultural ambitions. *The Masterworks* focuses on the non-residential works of the firm and is an effective complement to Samuel White's earlier book, *The Houses of McKim, Mead & White* (1998). Organized chronologically, this elegant study includes comprehensive discussions of the 24 "masterworks," accompanied by beautifully detailed photographs by Jonathan Wallen, beginning with early commissions such as the Newport Casino in Rhode Island (1879-80), later commissions

such as the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, several commissions for work at Columbia University and the Boston Symphony Hall and concluding with the American Academy in Rome (1911-14), "the firm's most enduring legacy."

The firm's early work reflected influences of the Arts and Crafts and Beaux-Arts movements, while the mature work represented a shift toward more classical architecture or classical precedents, particularly ancient Rome and the Italian Renaissance. Critics generally agree that the achievements of McKim, Mead & White were the direct result of the fruitful collaboration of Charles Follen McKim, William Rutherford Mead and Stanford White, three partners with different personalities, talents and artistic temperaments. Additional collaborations with well-known artists and landscape designers such as the sculptor, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, John La Farge and John Singer Sargent, among others, were a significant aspect of the firm's strategy.

Yet according to the Whites, there were specific constants that characterized the firm's architecture: "urbanism, artistic collaboration, empathy and an equal commitment to the traditions of classicism and the opportunities of modern life." *The Masterworks* essentially demonstrates how these values were applied or worked out in the buildings selected for inclusion in the book. "Empathy," a particularly interesting expression or quality of the work of McKim, Mead & White, is defined by the Whites as "a metaphorical voice that enabled those structures to engage in conversations with their surroundings and their observers." This essentially translates into the quality that makes "the Boston Library public," suggests particular bonds uniting club members (exemplified in discussions of the Harvard, Metropolitan and University clubs) and "proclaims the spirit of a church congregation," persuasively demonstrated in the meticulous photography and text accompanying consideration of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Stockbridge, Mass.

The firm's commissions extended well beyond the design of signature libraries, office buildings,  
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*Metropolitan Club (1891-1994),  
1 East 60th Street, New York City.*



### *McKim, Mead & White Revisited, continued from page 3*

universities and clubs. One of the firm's more significant commissions was the design of 16 gates and memorials at Harvard University between 1888–1906. Other public monuments included the Washington Memorial Arch at the beginning of Fifth Avenue in Greenwich Village, designed by Stanford White (1889–1995), and the well-known Civil War monument, the Robert Gould Shaw memorial in the Boston Common (1891–98). But design and implementation did not necessarily guarantee permanence, and some McKim, Mead & White buildings have not survived. The original Madison Square Garden, designed by Stanford White, one of the more well-known buildings in New York City, with its defining cream and masonry walls (depicted in a marvelous full-page watercolor

by W. Louis Sontag) was demolished in 1925. A more recent loss was Charles McKim's Pennsylvania Station, also in New York, in 1963.

Reputations of architects often wax and wane. Within 20 years after the partners' deaths, McKim, Mead & White was regarded with some "disdain," and by the conclusion of World War II, their reputation was somewhat nonexistent. Ironically, it was the demolition of Pennsylvania Station, the Whites note, that galvanized the preservation movement, and promoted critical reappraisal of McKim, Mead & White's mature designs. Criticism of the eccentricities of the firm's early work, the sharp versatility of their designs, considered a "liability," seems to have dissipated. In fact, if there is a subtext to the Whites' engaging study, it is to ensure that McKim, Mead & White's current well-regarded position in American architectural history is maintained.

*Carol Bere*

*Samuel G. White and Elizabeth White, McKim, Mead & White: The Masterworks, Rizzoli: New York, 2003. Photographs by Jonathan Wallen. The Friends of Florham thank Sam White, a partner in the New York-based architectural firm of Platt Byard Dovell White.*

### *Washington Portrait, continued from page 2*

Pine's art works in 1979. They circulated the picture among their gallery staff members and reported back that they did not believe the artist was Pine.

Because the old label referred to a "Daniel Bowen - Boston," who turned out to be the person who bought Pine's collection of paintings from his widow in 1792 and then opened a museum in Boston, we decided to pursue the painting's provenance in Massachusetts. Bowen had advertised 100 works by Pine for sale at his Boston museum in 1795. We requested the Massachusetts Historical Society to research the "Laurence Newell" referenced with "Daniel Bowen" on the label, thinking that the former might have acquired the painting from the latter. Unfortunately, no information on Newell turned up.

We then proceeded with the restoration of the painting, engaging Minako Ota, a highly qualified restorer located in Princeton, N.J. During the restoration, there were eight layers of paint and varnish detected. (It was noted that the work had been previously restored.) Ota also detected that there was an extremely thin layer of either paint or drawing on top of the original canvas. She suspected that this quite inaccessible layer, based on the vague text of the label, could have been a layer of a drawing by the artist Pine on which

another artist had finished an oil painting much later.

Our restorer recommended that we not remove the existing outer layer of the Washington portrait but suggested we have the painting inspected via X-ray or infrared analysis to confirm what was on the lowest layer. This we did, by taking the work to the Williamstown Art Conservation Center in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, they could not detect anything significant in the underlayer.

We thus directed our restorer, Ota, to complete the restoration and have ended up with a handsome portrait of Washington, but with the artist unknown. With respect to any level of attribution to Robert Edge Pine, our various experts feel there should be none. Some of us still think it is possible, however, that the oil painting was done by a competent artist who painted over a sketch made by, or copied from, Pine. We find it hard to completely dismiss the implications of that antique label.

*Richard C. Simon*

*Pine Background Source: Robert Edge Pine: A British Portrait Painter in America, 1784–1788, by Robert G. Stewart, curator of painting and sculptor, National Portrait Gallery, the Smithsonian Institution Press: City of Washington, 1979.*

the smooth daily running of the household and a most pleasant stay for guests for whom nothing was thought too expensive or extravagant.

### *The Twomblys maintained an imperial lifestyle at Florham.*

The Twomblys maintained an imperial lifestyle at Florham. Typically, the mansion would be filled with massive amounts of fresh flowers supplied by the estate's own orangerie and supplemented by outside sources. Formal dinners with the dining table dazzling with the very finest china, silver, crystal, massive candelabra and profuse floral decorations were de rigueur for this era. Gilded monogram cards were carefully placed at each setting before the guests arrived and the sideboards and buffets were likewise adorned in highly polished silver. Champagne, claret and the finest wines complemented the chef's culinary creations. The courses ascended upward from the kitchen on the dumbwaiter to the dining room in an orderly progression throughout the evening. Dinner was followed by coffee and cordials.

It is interesting to note that the hard times of the Depression were not entirely lost upon Mrs. Twombly. She elected to give up serving champagne and pâté de foie gras during these years, not because the Twomblys themselves were particularly hard up but rather thinking it would set a good example for the younger people. She instead served beer or claret to her guests.

At Winterthur, over the years a nine-story wing was added to the main house to display H.F. du Pont's immense collection of furnishings made or used in America prior to 1860. The house now consists of 175 period rooms of American decorative arts and furniture. Successive generations of the du Pont family resided at Winterthur. In 1926, Henry F. du Pont became the fifth owner of the estate following the death of his father, Col. Henry Algernon du Pont.

#### *Gardens and Landscape*

Another notable difference between the two estates is landscape. At its original 1,200 acres, Florham was half the size of Winterthur. Of that, 150 acres were specifically designed as a park by Frederick Law Olmsted with formal lawns, terraces and gardens. The 100-room mansion was carefully sited to overlook this park and the nearby valley. The ideal of the "gentleman farmer" is

evoked at Florham with its pastoral views from the back of the mansion stretching out over the 900-acre dairy farm.

Winterthur, by contrast is very hilly. It is more rustic, naturalistic and less formal. Winterthur does have a terraced formal garden in the back of the house, but it does not have the sweeping vistas of Florham. Henry F. du Pont's vision of the gardens at Winterthur was akin to walking on a journey — not everything should be revealed at once. However, while different, both the land and farm views at Florham and Winterthur are very important to both.

Each successive generation of the du Pont family added to the gardens at Winterthur. The gardens began as a formal rose garden and greenhouses which were tended by hired Scottish gardeners. By 1902, architectural terraced gardens were added as well as ponds, fountains, roses, herbaceous borders and a sunken garden for a more Gilded Age look. Around 1927, Winterthur's gardens were again expanded and enhancements were made to the woodland landscape. A conifer garden was added and the landscape took on a more rustic feel. Today the focus of Winterthur's gardens is the woodland garden.

#### *More Recently*

Henry F. du Pont opened Winterthur as a museum in 1951. He moved from the main house to a regency-style villa he built just a few hundred yards away. He continued to divide his time between Winterthur and his other homes until his death in 1969. He was survived by his daughters, Pauline Louise du Pont and Ruth Ellen du Pont.

### *Each successive generation of the du Pont family added to the gardens.*

While Winterthur gradually moved with society's leanings in the 1920s toward a more relaxed and casual style and lifestyle, Florham did not embrace such changes. Florence Twombly firmly maintained her ties to the Gilded Age and continued to live on in a grand and imperial style. She retained her title as the uncrowned dowager queen of American society until her death at age 99 in 1952.

Present-day Winterthur consists of approximately 1,000 acres, and the gardens are seasonal. Fortu-



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### *Winterthur and Florham, continued from page 5*

nately, the furnishings at Winterthur are intact and can be enjoyed by visitors to the museum and gardens. The contents of Florham were sold by the Twombly's last surviving daughter at a public auction in 1955. Ironically, H.F. du Pont noted in correspondence to a Mr. Wm. Perry dated January 1955 regarding the Twombly sale that furnishings "from the Twombly's house would be of the best quality." The buildings were left empty, and the grounds became overgrown. In 1957 the Esso Research and Engineering Company purchased 650 acres of what had been the Twombly farm. In 1958, Fairleigh Dickinson University purchased 187 acres of the estate, including the mansion and other buildings for what is the present-day College at Florham.

*Today, both of these grand country estates serve us in completely different capacities.*

Today, both of these grand country estates serve us in completely different capacities. Winterthur as a museum, with its splendid gardens and nationally-acclaimed research library. Florham lives on as a thriving university moving briskly along into the new millennium. As such, much of what has been or could be done at each property is directly influenced by what is practical for use in real life and its present form.

*Elaine Earlywine*